

Use of Video-Clip examples to interview Japanese Special Education Teachers about their teaching strategies

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Current educational globalisation has revealed differences in teacher practices across cultures. Qualitative ways of doing research have helped to unpack cultural reasons for everyday practices. This paper explores the use of video-clip examples (VCs) to interview Japanese special education teachers working with children with autism spectrum disorders about their classroom practices. A previous study showed that a group of Japanese teachers talked about their practices in an abstract way so that what they were actually doing with these children was unclear to an Australian researcher. In this study, VCs selected from observation data of Japanese teachers' own teaching provided a concrete focus when individual teachers talked about classroom interactions Callingham and helped them articulate their culturally embedded practice. This method provided a useful way to interview these teachers about their classroom interactions from moment to moment and about their lesson study practices focusing on learning process. Talking about live interactions in VCs clarified their explanations of what they were doing. Their talk about the VCs was also consistent with the lesson study process of transforming knowledge from tacit to explicit form in their own teaching.

Introduction

More cross-cultural research to expose culturally different ways of teaching children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) has been urged in order to find new culturally specific possibilities that improve teacher practice for educating those children. Many researchers have reported different ways of teaching among cultures (e.g., Callingham, 2012; Dronkers, 2010; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). For example, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) discovered dominant ways of teaching children at public schools among three different nations (i.e., Japan, Germany, and U.S.A.). Moreover, qualitative cross-cultural studies have been an emerging topic in education for children with ASDs (Daley, 2002). In particular, social aspects of those children's disability have required a better understanding of a cultural role in teaching them in their local contexts (Trembath, Balandin, & Rossi, 2005). That is, expectations about social competence and related communicative skills have been defined within the culture where the children are present (e.g., Matson et al., 2012). Evidence-based practices evaluated as effective for teaching children with ASDs in English-language cultural settings (e.g., Simpson & Myles, 2008), therefore, could not be assumed to be effective in other cultures or to be valued and welcomed by teachers and parents with those cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, economic and practical reasons for teaching children with ASDs in a group setting have been emerging. On one hand, government budgets for diagnosis and intervention have been stretched by its increasing prevalence and by its therapeutic focus

on one-to-one supports (e.g., Matson & Kozlowski, 2011; Sun & Allison, 2010). On the other hand, a current movement toward inclusive education has raised an idealistic expectation that regular education classroom teachers can respond appropriately to the needs of children with ASDs in their mainstream classrooms. In primary schools, it has been reported that children with ASDs in regular classrooms have spent more time with paraprofessionals (e.g., teacher aides) than with their classroom teachers or with fully qualified special education teachers (Suter & Giangreco, 2009).

Little research has been conducted to establish how qualified special educators use their knowledge and skills to work with these children in their classrooms. Some studies have suggested that group teaching may help children with ASDs learn appropriate social and communication skills through peer interactions (e.g., Bohlander, Orlich, & Varley, 2012; Krasny, Williams, Provencal, & Ozonoff, 2003; White, Keonig, & Scahill, 2007). That is, some English-language research has shown that peers can be a social model (i.e., peer-modelling), teach or encourage peers with ASDs (i.e., peer-instruction, peer-mediation), and develop social relationships among peers in their everyday classroom environments. However, this type of training has not yet been classified as evidence-based practice (Simpson & Myles, 2008). It has been recognised that it is logistically difficult to obtain appropriate evidence from long-term observations of interventions among peers (Koenig, De Los Reyes, Cicchetti, Scahill, & Klin, 2009). Likewise, little has been known about what special educators do with children with ASDs in their classroom settings.

Reflective inquiry into everyday practice in a traditional Japanese approach to professional development, known as lesson study, has attracted international interest. American researchers, Lewis, Perry, and Friedkin (2009) viewed this teacher-driven practice as in-school action research and developed a model showing how it is used to improve lessons. Matoba, Shibata, and Sarkar Arani (2007) emphasised school-university partnerships in professional knowledge creation through Japanese lesson study. This in-school research driven by Japanese teachers has been recognised as an essential part of their professional roles (Ôta, 2005), and Stigler and Hiebert (1999) reported that one Japanese teacher said that he will not be a teacher if he does not conduct lesson study. Much of the work relating to lesson study is voluntary in nature (i.e., before and after the teaching day). Studies of Japanese lesson study and its application to regular education in other countries (e.g., U.S, Hong Kong, Iran) have been increasing (e.g., Lee, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Matoba & Sarkar Arani, 2005). Kikkawa and Bryer (2012a, 2012b) called for direct observation of how special educators use the lesson study practice for improving their everyday practice in Japan, because this practice appeared to be an essential and embedded process in order to improve Japanese special educators' everyday teaching practice.

The participating teachers of this study used one particular lesson style, called "*seikatsutangen-gakushū*" or life-skill learning unit, which has been widely used by special educators of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) in special education settings in Japan (Japanese National Institute of Special Needs Education, NISE, 2006). The frequent co-occurrence of ASDs with ID (Matson & Nebel-Schwalm, 2007) has meant that many children with ASDs have ID and are often enrolled in special education classrooms designed for ID. In this approach to teaching practice, group activities have been repeated with modifications added over a period of one whole unit (i.e., a series of featured lessons), and with a focus

on everyday life skills (e.g., daily-life skills, independency, autonomy) and social matters (e.g., peer relationships, group effort, group belonging). According to the teacher guide for using this life-skill learning unit (NISE, 2006), this practice has required special educators to have the “lesson skills” to create a “good” lesson designed around the specific children (i.e., individual needs, group needs). To achieve this, these special educators were recommended to engage in a lesson study practice to transfer tacit knowledge (i.e., an abstract view of the ideal lesson) into shared information (i.e., a visualisation of classroom interactions and events) through group discussions with teacher colleagues (Ôta, 2006).

The notion of an individual bringing a cultural lens or perspective to bear on that individual’s ways of viewing and understanding a phenomenon in social space has been discussed in recent cross-cultural literature (e.g., Okawa, 2008; Rodríguez, Rodríguez, & Mojica, 2012; Suzuki, 2009). That is, it has been shown that personal histories of researchers (i.e., where and how they have grown up and been educated) define how they evaluate the teaching practices of others and how they make sense of what they heard or saw during interviews and observations. Suzuki (2009), for example, suggested that, to understand culturally different ways of teaching, researchers need to suspend their own cultural lens. Kikkawa and Bryer (2012a) extended Suzuki’s notion by demonstrating that negotiation with the participating teachers about interview questions and research procedures is critical to a careful examination of teaching practice from local teachers’ point of views.

Discussions among a group of three Japanese special educators working in a primary unit showed a culturally distinctive interactive and inductive way of teaching children with ASDs in their classrooms, which involved formative assessment of the children’s learning (Kikkawa, Bryer, & Beamish, 2012). These teachers’ talk indicated that they used interactive ways of teaching these children to improve social awareness and cooperation, independence, and engagement in activities. To achieve these goals, these teachers developed a careful lesson plan with anticipations of possible interactions during the lesson and assessed how their children responded to their learning experiences from moment to moment.

However, the indirect and abstract nature of their talk often did not make clear what they were actually doing with these children to Australian researchers (Kikkawa et al., 2012). Haugh (2003) claimed that traditional Japanese values such as the importance of preserving harmony (*wa*) and group orientation (*shudan shugi*) accounted for the highly contextualised nature of Japanese communication and preference for nonverbal, subjective, emotional, and spiritual communication. What was clear to the Japanese special educators within their group discussion and to the Japanese researcher transcribing this interview was not culturally available to Australian interpretation.

This report considers how another set of three Japanese special educators working in a primary unit undertook reflective interviews with the researcher (first author) about their instruction and interaction with children with ASDs during their group lessons. Video-clip examples (VCs, hereafter) were made from taping of a lesson from their life-skills learning unit over many weeks. There was at least one child with ASDs in their groups of four to six children in Years 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 respectively. These teachers engaged in multiple activities for this study during the first term in the school year.

Setting, Sample and Procedure of Using Video-Clip Examples

Videorecording seemed to provide an option for clarifying the practice of Japanese special educators and overcoming expressive vagueness and indirectness about their teaching. The usefulness of applying video recordings to education research has been increasingly recognised as technology with lower cost and simplified access has become more available (e.g., Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012). Video devices were used to record classroom lessons in a special need education unit (SNEU) at a Japanese elementary school attached to a national university (*Note*. One lesson lasted approximately 45 minutes). School approval was confirmed, and then ethical consent was obtained from each participating teacher and parent of the children enrolled in the SNEU.

Three classroom teachers (see Table 1) of this unit participated in a series of short individual interviews every week across a 9-week period of field research. Before each interview, the researcher created VCs from the same week's featured group lesson. The selection of moments was based on how these teachers used group instructions for their children with ASDs during their group lessons. Every Japanese teacher was invited to describe what they were doing and articulate what they were thinking at the specific moment shown in the VCs.

Table 1 The Participating Teachers

Teacher code (class)	Pseudonym	Gender	Age group of children	Number of children	
				Total	ASDs
JT1 (SNEU1)	Ms Ando	F	6-8 years old (Year 1-2)	6	2
JT2 (SNEU2)	Mr Banba	M	8-10 years old (Year 3-4)	5	2
JT3 (SNEU3)	Ms Chiba	F	10-12 years old (Year 5-6)	4	2

A three-step process was used to making VCs: (a) conduct a direct observation while using video devices; (b) ask teachers for quick feedback after the lesson to find "Key Moments" from their point of view; and (c) review the audiovisual data and create video-clips of Key Moments identified both by the teacher and researcher. The VCs were then prepared prior to the follow-up individual interviews at the end of the week or, occasionally, early in the next week.

The reflective interviews started with overall reflections about their teaching week, the children with ASDs across the week and during the lesson, modifications made in their lessons since the last observation, and any input to that lesson from other teachers or educators. Reflection on VCs was then conducted at the end of each reflective interview. Ms Ando had more VCs ($n = 23$) because she used free play, which had more abstract learning goals and instructions. In contrast, Mr Banba ($n = 15$) and Ms Chiba ($n = 18$) used cooking activities, which had clearer aims and, therefore, more specific instructions by these two teachers. This reflective interview session was recorded by using a MP3 player, and audio data were directly transferred into the researcher's personal computer and transcribed into a Microsoft Word file. The original texts were translated from English to Japanese through a layered process of cross-interpretation (Kikkawa, 2007).

Usefulness of Using Video-clip Examples

In this report, the Japanese teachers' talk about the VCs was reviewed in order to evaluate the usefulness of using this method for interviewing the Japanese special educators. This method enabled these teachers to talk about daily practices that may be conducted automatically and unconsciously. This method was also matched to their preference for specific and clear questions based on concrete examples when being interviewed (Kikkawa et al., 2012). The concrete images from VCs of their actual practices appeared to help these teachers talk about their stories in their classroom and confirm what occurs in the Key Moments from the teachers' point of view. It also helped overcome the complexity of social interactions during classroom lessons, which did not translate well in simple Japanese-English transcription. It was also found effective for the teachers to talk about their ongoing process of lesson development. During reviewing the VCs, the Japanese teachers appeared to reflect on the whole process of their approach to the lesson: They talked about their ongoing process of teaching children with ASDs before, during, and after the lesson shown in the video. Additionally, these teachers reported issues in teaching children with ASDs in a group. Thus, there seemed to be several advantages of using video-recording for self-reflections on group teaching. Table 2 summarises features of those children who appeared in teacher-facilitator conversations (i.e., dialogues) in this report.

Table 2 Children Who Featured in Teacher-Facilitator Dialogues

Pseudonym	Gender	ASD/other Diagnosis	Class	Year
Aiko	F	ASD	SNEU1	1
Bunta	M	ASD	SNEU1	2
Chiaki	M	ASD	SNEU2	4
Daichi	M	ASD	SNEU2	4
Eji	M	ASD	SNEU3	6
Fuji	M	ASD	SNEU3	6
Haru	F	-	SNEU1	1
Osamu	M	Down's syndrome	SNEU3	5

Overcoming Abstraction in Japanese Expression

They used the broad term, *bamen*, or “scene”, to describe the moment of a lesson as part of a whole situation. They used this term to articulate what is happening at this moment in the lesson—all interactions, events, and interpretations of children's inner engagement (i.e., thoughts). *Dialogue 1* shows that Mr Banba talked about how he fostered “a sense of

group belonging” in the children of his class. He set up a lesson scene within which the children become aware of peers’ presence and are encouraged to interact, to help them during the lesson. More specifically, he employed a video letter from a chef (i.e., a SNEU head pretending to be a chef) to create a playful and exciting opening for the group lesson. His reflection indicates that one child with ASDs, Chiaki, became more active in taking initiative to lead the class after watching the video letter.

Lesson Preparation

The VCs helped the teachers articulate what they had prepared for the lesson and how they wanted to approach the children during the lesson. For example, Mr Banba explained why and how he developed a learning tool (i.e., cooking bowl) for one child with ASDs (Daichi), who found it hard to turn a bowl to transfer cake paste from his individual bowl to his group container. *Dialogue 2* indicated that Mr Banba attempted several times to develop the cooking tool (i.e., putting handles on an individual bowl to prompt a better angle for the child to twist his wrist), which enabled Daichi to complete the task independently.

Similarly, Ms Chiba changed an arrangement of learning procedures (*Dialogue 3*): The children completed a certain amount of their tasks by themselves first before they were required to wait for their peers to finish the tasks. These children used to complete the activity step by step as a group. Therefore, they were required to wait for their peers at every step, and this procedure frustrated a child with ASDs (Eji), who was able to complete these tasks quickly. It also had a negative impact on peer relationships between this child and another child (Osamu), who required more time to complete the same amount of work. The VCs helped Ms Chiba verbalise her intention of making this arrangement as she aimed to perform the activity as a whole group.

Lesson Delivery

Conversations about the event shown in the VCs also confirmed that the Japanese teachers made ongoing assessment of the children’s interactions and perspectives and of the teachers’ own actions. The conversations, although they appeared very casual, involved much professional judgements and thoughts. In particular, the teacher of younger children (Ms Ando) made ongoing assessment of children’s reactions to her interactions to gain better understandings of the children and also to develop further lesson planning. The following examples demonstrated why the teacher took the action as part of her instructions and how she viewed the moment through her own critical reflection.

In *Dialogue 4*, one VC showed classroom interactions between Ms Ando and the children of SNEU1: After Ms Ando entered the house, which the children made with jumbo blocks, she “accidentally” broke it down, which was her intention to create a collaborative *bamen*. After her action, the children complained to the teacher about what she had done. Ms Ando viewed the scene of the VC as a failure of her intention. She suggested that she should have made the *bamen* clearer to the children by being meaner to them so that these children would take actions collaboratively (e.g., protest) against her.

Moreover, *Dialogue 5* indicated that a simple conversation between the teacher and the children, which seemed to be casual chat with no particular intention, involved teacher

intentionality. Showing the classroom interaction in a VC opened a dialogic space in which Ms Ando articulated her professional thoughts. In the VC, Ms Ando had a conversation with the children about the play in which that they were engaging. She simply asked the children what they wanted to name this playing activity as part of her lesson planning process with the children. Similarly, Dialogue 6 showed that Ms Ando tried to understand the children's perspective on what they want to do through interactions during playing together. In the VC, the children built a cubic house with jumbo blocks and played inside the house. She asked the children whose house it is, and one child with ASDs, Aiko, answered that it is for SNEU1. Ms Ando explained how she viewed the children's responses. That is, she tried to extract the children's story from their responses to understand a lesson *bamen* from the children's point of view. These dialogues illustrated the process of sharing the same image of the *bamen* with the children as part of developing a lesson.

Furthermore, Ms Ando's reflection on classroom interactions within one VC showed how she made a professional judgement quickly on the critical moment during the lesson (*Dialogue 7*). In the VC, while the SNEU children played, one enemy, Sandman, visited to their lesson (*Note*. Sandman had visited their lessons several times before this lesson and behaved badly to the children). The children engaged in a group activity to defeat Sandman collaboratively as part of their routine and waited for him to run away. However, Sandman stayed in the room, cried, and revealed that he wanted to play with the children. As planned, Ms Ando asked the children what they wanted to do with Sandman when he said that he wanted to play with them. Some children said that they did not want to play with him, but one girl said that she would play with him. After Ms Ando praised the girl, the rest of children also agreed to forgive Sandman. Ms Ando's reflection on this VC revealed how she planned this interaction ahead, why she planned it, what she did, and how she viewed the actual interacting moment (see also, Kikkawa & Bryer, 2012b). Her dialogue articulated that she planned the lesson with the hope that the lesson experience would become a model case of how to respond to a similar situation when the children encountered real-life trouble (i.e., forgiving a friend who was very mean to them but said "sorry").

Likewise, the teachers assessed critical moments during the lesson to find for the best opportunity for creating a moment of making group effort (Mr Banba) and for using one child's mistake as a group learning opportunity (Ms Chiba). For example, one VC of Ms Chiba showed that Osamu dropped his egg on the floor while other children were observing. Then, Ms Chiba asked the children what they should do now. Ms Chiba's reflection on this VC indicated that she chose her action to encourage the child to solve the problem by himself as well as to facilitate other children to help the child (*Dialogue 8*).

Post-lesson Evaluation

Teachers' reflections on VCs also revealed improvements made after the lesson. The teachers often made adjustments for their lessons (e.g., adding further individual support, rearranging learning environments) after the lessons were observed earlier in the week. *Dialogue 9*, for example, indicated a sequence of lesson experiences for the children and ongoing process of improving a lesson across the unit. Ms Chiba progressively added or

modified learning procedures, tools, and environments so that the children were able to feel self-satisfaction in each lesson.

Advantages of Using Video-Recording for Group Teaching

Use of this VC method had benefits for the teachers watching their own teaching. For example, Ms Ando noticed that she did not realise that one child with ASDs (Bunta) was wandering around other children playing together when she was delivering the lesson (*Dialogue 10*). She interpreted his wandering behaviour as him wanting to play with them but not knowing how to join his peers. Similarly, Ms Chiba found that one child with ASDs (Fuji) was not fully involved in the class, although he stayed “somehow” close to everyone during the lesson (*Dialogue 11*). These examples indicated the typical problem of group teaching in that one teacher does not see all that is happening in the classroom during the lesson. Yet, at the same time, the teachers spoke about the usefulness of watching videos of their own lessons for group teaching (viz., better understandings of children and improvements in their instructions).

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This video-clip method of asking Japanese special educators to talk about examples of their practice was helpful in revealing culturally embedded practices. They talked freely about what happened in specific teaching moments and commented on their thoughts and professional judgements made before, during, and after a lesson. These reflections revealed the embedding of lesson study process in how they view their practice. That is, these teachers engaged in ongoing assessment of the featured lesson across the whole unit and in immediate assessment of children’s learning at specific moments within a lesson. Professional judgements were ongoing and dynamic during the lesson. Although classroom interactions did not appear to show much movement, the teachers carefully observed every moment and chose the best strategy for facilitating children’s learning (e.g., waiting patiently for children to show initiative and take actions that help friends). Their high engagement in creating a “good” lesson revealed the Japanese cultural emphasis on teachers’ role: Lesson is also special education teachers’ profession (Ôta, 2005).

Moreover, audiovisual examples of their own teaching provided these teachers with a concrete focus when they talked about classroom interactions and helped them articulate their practice. These examples helped the teachers and the facilitator to share the same “scene” or moment of the lesson, and they were able to refer to specific events or interactions. This cognitive sharing between the teachers and facilitator created a dialogic space to reveal culturally specific practices from the participating teachers’ point of view. Additionally, videorecording a lesson confirmed the dynamic nature of social interactions during classroom lessons (Ball & Forzani, 2007), revealed practical difficulties in missed opportunities when teaching children with ASDs in a group, and helped these teachers to plan and evaluate teaching children in a group.

The Japanese teachers were highly engaged in visualising their ideal lesson and using ongoing assessment of their own teaching when delivering a lesson. That is, they were translating theory into practice or translating ideal into reality. The apparently indirect and vague ways of expressing their practice were part of their process of creating a “good”

lesson: They looked at their own teaching critically and questioned what they could improve for the next lesson. Because there was no one definition of a good lesson, these teachers were required to inquire about their ideal practice for their own classes. This method of using video-recording examples from their own teaching helped the teachers express their personal thoughts or tacit knowledge in their own words; therefore, culturally specific ways of teaching children with ASDs became explicit to the facilitator.

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